18 December 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Morning Meeting of 18 December 1968

The Director was on leave. DDCI was in the chair.

ADD/I mentioned that a memorandum on the Soviet Mediterranean fleet was distributed to the community yesterday. He passed a copy to the DDCI.

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ADD/I drew attention to Victor Zorza's article in today's Washington Post containing some unwarranted criticisms of past intelligence Estimates regarding Soviet military capabilities.

ADD/I reminded that Thursday's SIG meeting will be on General Wood's study on overseas bases.

ADD/I reported that he will brief Robert Mayo, the Director-designate of the Bureau of the Budget, tomorrow morning.

Godfrey advised that the President sent a letter to Prince Sihanouk which might encourage him to release the American captives now being held in Cambodia.

Godfrey drew attention to the sharp rise in the price of gold this morning as a result of the recent statements by David Kennedy, the Treasury Secretary-designate.

Godfrey noted that Ambassador Sullivan has sent in a provocative cable estimating that the Chinese Communists will soon begin to replace the North Vietnamese as the predominant revolutionary force in Southeast Asia.

X1 [redacted] DDCI said that he intends to have a meeting with representatives of the interested Agency components later today.

Carver observed that the disarray over the negotiations in Paris continues, citing several examples of disagreement among the participants and noting that press interpretations of these disagreements are somewhat less than completely accurate.

Carver advised that the memorandum requested by Walt Rostow on North Vietnamese infiltration through Laos was completed and sent to Rostow yesterday.

X1 Carver introduced [redacted] who is replacing George Allen on the SAVA staff.

X1 Maury informed that Senator Jackson called yesterday regarding the [redacted] case.

[redacted] 25X

DDCI discussed various problems relating to efforts to improve our technical collection capabilities against the USSR [redacted] 25X1

DDCI informed that the President has accepted the recommendation of the Bureau of the Budget with regard to the replenishment of the Agency's Contingency Reserve. He noted that the problem of the Radios has been deferred in order that the new Administration may act upon it.

DDCI said that he will have lunch with South African Ambassador Taswell on Friday. [redacted] 25X

DDCI asked [redacted] about Hanson Baldwin's visit to Head- 25X
X1 quarters yesterday. [redacted] reported that all went well.

[redacted] 25X

L. K. White

Victor Zorza

Prospects Are Encouraging For U.S.-Soviet Agreements

Against all expectation, the visitor will find in Washington today strong reasons for optimism about future American relations with the Communist world. President-elect Nixon's repeated insistence on ending the period of confrontation, and on beginning a new era of negotiation, is intended to be taken seriously, and already his advisers are at work to translate this into a meaningful invitation to the Russians in his inaugural address next month.

China, too, appears likely to receive some encouragement. Peking's overtures for more substantive talks at the ambassadorial meetings in Warsaw, timed to catch the attention of the incoming administration, have aroused strong interest here.

But most important of all are the indications that the Kremlin may really be ready for far-reaching adjustments in the balance of power in the field of strategic weapons and in conventional weapons on both sides of the line that divides Europe in two.

It is now clear that the Soviet Union has the technological and industrial capability to acquire considerably more than parity in numbers of land-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The question is not whether it can go beyond the point of parity, but whether it will.

BETWEEN 1966 and 1967, the Soviet Union more than doubled the number of its ICBMs, from 340 to 720. This took the United States by surprise. American intelligence did not suspect that Russia could spare the economic resources, or had the political will, to challenge the massive American superiority of more than 1000 ICBMs.

The political assessment was based on Nikita Khrushchev's evident reluctance to waste money on arms, and it did not pay sufficient attention to the many signs during the year or two preceding his fall that he was being challenged on this very issue by the opposition in the Kremlin.

Indeed, it did not expect the fall of Khrushchev, and when he did fall the evidence continued to be ignored. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara was given a brief which led him to say as late as 1965 that the Soviet leaders "have lost the quantitative race, and that they are not seeking to engage us in that conflict." There was no indication, he said, that they were in the race, that they were catching up "or planning to catch up."

He had been misinformed. The indications were there, in the open press, in the scarcly veiled complaints that Khrushchev had neglected the country's defenses—and soon they became available on the ground as well, in the holes that the Russians were digging for the new missiles.

It takes at least 18 months, often more than that, to prepare a hardened silo for a modern missile, and the signs of activity are easily observed by spy-in-the-sky satellites. When evidence of the Soviet buildup became available, it did not upset the American strategic program, because McNamara had in fact provided himself with a large surplus and with a number of options to guard against just this kind of surprise.

WHAT THE INCIDENT does show, however, is that it is difficult to make hard estimates except on the basis of hard evidence, and that it is even more difficult to make them credible in the absence of such evidence. For there certainly were those in the American intelligence community who saw Khrushchev's political difficulties, anticipated the arms buildup—and were overruled.

Once again, there is an argument now between those who believe that the Russians will use their demonstrated capability for a massive buildup, and will proceed to acquire superior numbers of land-launched missiles, and those who believe that the Russians will pause when they attain parity.

This time, however, the hard evidence favors the view of those who believe that the Russians propose to exercise a measure of self-restraint. Once again it is those gaping holes in the ground that speak loudest. On the best information available here, the Soviet buildup, which raised the figure of operational ICBMs to 900 by last October, looks like leveling out by about mid-year when parity is reached with the 1054 land-launched missiles in the American force.

The Soviet Union could then go on to provide itself with additional submarine-launched missiles (of which the United States has 656, and Russia has 75 to 80) and with mobile land-launched ICBMs, on which the Russians are known to be working.

But present Soviet dispositions are such as to suggest that, if missile limitation talks are held, the Soviet Union could demonstrate its interest in a moratorium by desisting from doing something that it has the clear capability to do. This would enable the new administration to engage in talks on missile limitation without at the same time rushing ahead to fulfill Nixon's campaign promises about ensuring America's "superiority" in strategic weapons.

IN EUROPE, the evidence is much more speculative. The Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia, which now number between 40,000 and 50,000, are demonstratively deployed in such a way as to present no threat to existing NATO dispositions. No work of any kind is being done by them to suggest that they intend to present any such threat in the future.

The Russians are leaning over backwards, in other words, to provide no justification for the military reinforcement of NATO which is under discussion by member governments. They are doing this, moreover, in the face of the weakening of the Warsaw Pact structure which has resulted from the departure, to all intents and purposes, of the Czechoslovak forces from the effective fighting strength of the Communist camp.

Does this mean that the Russians are prepared, for the first time since the war, to abandon a deployment of forces based on the assumption of a continuing military threat to their security in Europe? The invasion of Czechoslovakia has shown that in case of real need the Soviet Union can rapidly muster and shift large numbers of combat-ready troops to any Warsaw Pact country —with its agreement, or without.

The argument often heard in the United States that American forces in Europe should be greatly reduced, and should then be airlifted back in case of need, must have its own mirror-image in the Kremlin among the advocates of a similar Russian withdrawal. The demonstration of the force of their arguments by the invasion of Czechoslovakia will have given them gratuitous but powerful support. Could the Soviet Union now cut or at least thin out some of the 22 divisions it maintains in East Garmany?

THE QUESTION is particularly relevant because the Soviet divisions facing China all along that huge and insecure border, which have been kept understrength for so long, have lately been fleshed out with new men and equipment, providing a clear demonstration of Russia's determination to strengthen its forces there.

Moreover, the large amount of new military construction in that area, including airfields and other "infrastructure" facilities, provides convincing evidence that the Soviet general staff perceives a clear and long-term threat from the direction of China.

The invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet buildup of strategic forces have thus provided openings for the negotiations between the White House and the Kremlin on which Nixon is so intent. And both the Russians and the Americans stand to gain from the talks when they finally come about.

Victor Zorza is in Washington for a short visit.